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Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination with the Public and Others

Effective conservation planning begins with effective consultation with the public and conservation partners, including: other Federal and State agencies, county and town officials, civic groups, non-government conservation and education organizations, and user groups. To ensure that future management of the refuge considers the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by the public, USFWS used a variety of public involvement techniques to inform this CCP/EIS.

Public interest in the future management of Chincoteague NWR is widespread. The concerns and situations of the interested members of the public are diverse. The refuge has heard from businesses and full-time and part-time residents from the town of Chincoteague and neighboring communities; hunters and harvesters of waterfowl, fish, shellfish, and upland species; visitors who come to observe birds, the Chincoteague ponies, monarch butterflies, and other wildlife or who seek solitude and respite in the natural world; beachgoers, OSV drivers, horseback riders, and other non-wildlife-dependent recreation users; and State agencies and other programs and organizations concerned about the role and contributions the refuge can play in a larger network of natural areas across the State, the mid-Atlantic, and the Atlantic coast migratory bird flyway.

What follows is the chronology of public outreach activities USFWS conducted while preparing this document. It does not detail activities associated with studies that informed the document, such as the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge Alternative Transportation Study (2010), or the hundreds of informal discussions the refuge manager and his staff had. Those involved a wide range of audiences, including congressional representatives or their staffs, local community leaders and other residents, refuge neighbors, refuge visitors, and other interested individuals. During those discussions, the refuge manager and his staff often would provide an update on the CCP/EIS progress and encourage comments and other participation. Since 2009, the refuge manager has held regularly monthly meetings with community leaders and held Town Hall Meetings for the public each May with NPS. The refuge also continued regular communication with NPS throughout the process.

5.1 Pre-Planning Meetings

Refuge pre-planning for the CCP began in 2007. In December, we held an initial joint planning meeting between refuge and NPS Assateague Island National Seashore staff regarding overlaps between the agencies' respective long-range planning processes. The NPS document is known as the General Management Plan (GMP) and similar to the CCP, establishes a vision and provides broad guidance for park management over the next 15 to 20 years. Other pre-planning meetings included local outreach, participation in state events, and working meetings between the CCP consultant at the time, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and USFWS staff. Specific meetings of note were as follows:

- *May 15-16, 2007:* USFWS staff meeting to discuss the development of a draft HMP, to be incorporated into the CCP.
- *July 16, 2007:* Meeting with Town Council and Ron Wolff, Supervisor, Accomack County.
- *December 17-19, 2007:* Meeting with Seashore to identify common goals, issues of concern, and opportunities for coordination as each agency begins long-range planning processes for their respective units.

- *September 2-5, 2008*: First core planning team meeting to develop work plan, discuss key issues, identify data needs, and meet with NPS for the Seashore's GMP kickoff meeting (September 3-4).
- *October 30, 2008*: Commonwealth of Virginia event, "Conserving Virginia's Fish and Wildlife for the Future: Preparing for a Changing Climate," with references to Chincoteague NWR.
- *February 26, 2009*: Technical experts meeting to discuss the overall CCP process, to discuss sea level rise, to review/rank top issues of concern, to define the study area, and to identify conservation areas and critical habitat in the study area.
- *March 10, 2009*: The Commonwealth of Virginia wildlife and climate change workshop.
- *May 11, 2009*: Town Hall Meeting in Chincoteague held by the refuge manager and Assateague Island National Seashore superintendent, with the ongoing GMP and upcoming CCP as major discussion topics.
- *February 25, 2010*: Technical experts meeting to continue discussion of the development of a draft HMP, to be incorporated into the CCP.

5.2 **Federal Register Notice of Intent**

USFWS published the original Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* on September 17, 2010, stating that USFWS intended to prepare "a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) document for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Wallops Island NWR."

5.3 **Public Meetings and Comments**

USFWS received public comments from a wide range of user groups and interested parties during two formal periods prior to release of the draft CCP/EIS: the initial scoping period and the presentation of the preliminary draft alternatives. Both of these are described further in this section. Public meetings and comments that came after release of the draft CCP/EIS are addressed further in section 5.7, and appendix R.

5.3.1 **Scoping**

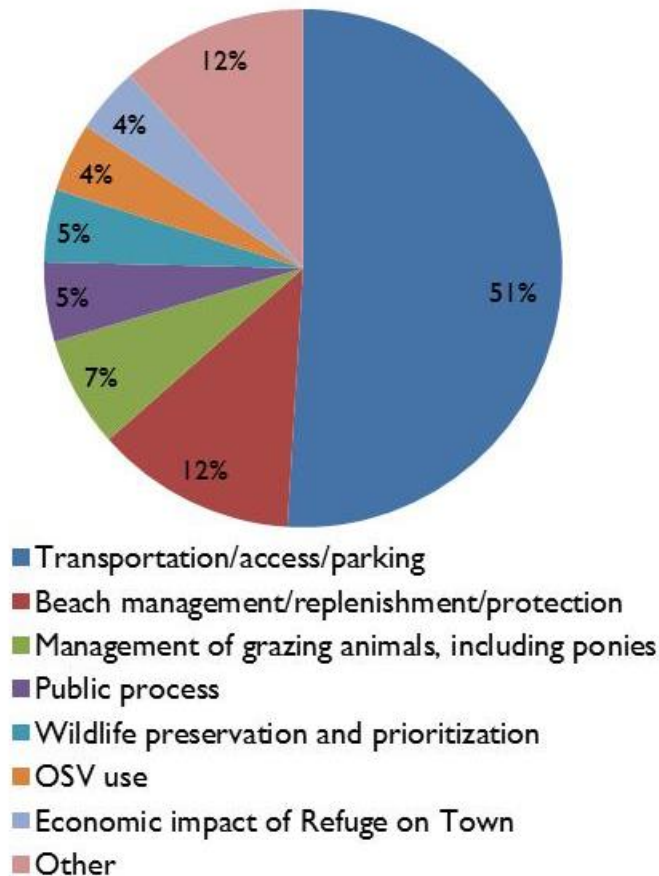
USFWS conducted a public scoping period from September 17, 2010, through January 18, 2011, to gather public input and identify key issues and concerns to consider during the CCP process. During this timeframe, USFWS invited the public to submit comments and communicated information through news releases, the refuge Web site, and flyers made available at the refuge.

As part of this initial scoping process, USFWS held four events across 3 separate days:

- *August 25, 2010*: Open house event from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the parking area by the public recreational beach.
- *September 21, 2010*: Two public meetings and open houses at the Chincoteague Community Center in the Town of Chincoteague; one from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and one from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- *January 13, 2011*: Public meeting from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Old Train Station in Snow Hill, Maryland.

Over 150 participants attended these meetings and wrote down over 200 discrete comments. In addition, 134 written comments were received by mail, including official comments from the town of Chincoteague's Chincoteague to Assateague Beach Access Committee, the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce, the County of Accomack, the Citizens Beach Committee, TNC, Ducks Unlimited, and Defenders of Wildlife. Figure 5-1 provides a general categorization of scoping comments by topic.

Figure 5-1: General Categorization of Scoping Comments



5.3.2 Preliminary Alternatives

Preliminary draft alternatives were developed in summer 2011, after 10 months of initial scoping and public involvement. On August 15, 2011, the USFWS published a newsletter with descriptions of four preliminary draft alternatives, which initiated the public comment period on the draft alternatives for further alternative development in this CCP/EIS.

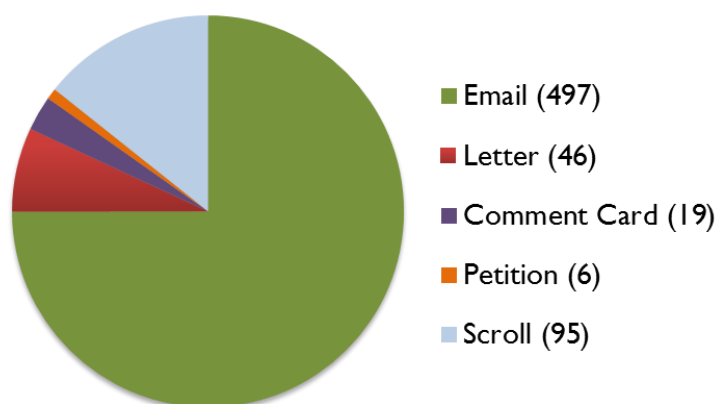
The alternatives comment period began on August 15, 2011, and was set to end on October 1, 2011, but was extended to October 31, 2011 at the request of the public. Four public meetings were held to present the draft CCP alternatives on 3 separate days in August:

- *August 22, 2011:* Two public meetings, one from 9 a.m. to noon at the recreational beach on the refuge and one from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Chincoteague Center.

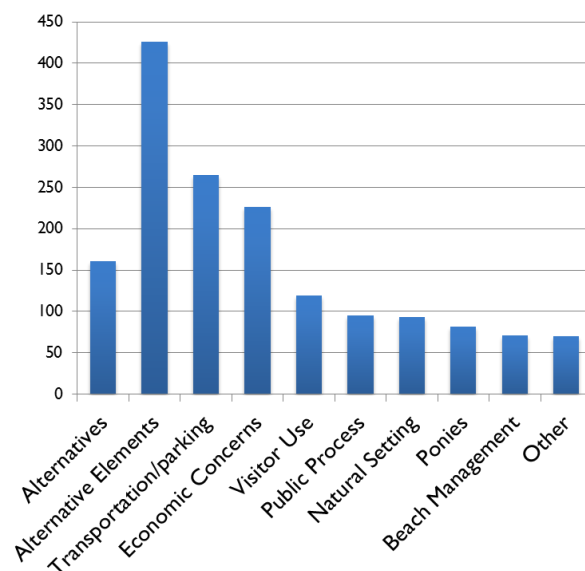
- *August 30, 2011*: One public meeting from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Eastern Shore Community College in Melfa, Virginia.
- *August 31, 2011*: One public meeting from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Delmarva Discovery Center in Pocomoke City, Maryland.

In all, 663 comments were received. Approximately 17 percent (113) of commenters self-identified as property owners and 29 percent (189) of commenters self-identified as visitors. The format of written comments included the use of the public meeting comment form, personalized emails or letters, and petitions (see Figure 5-2). Written comments on draft alternatives were submitted directly to the Refuge Manager, the USFWS regional office, or to the refuge staff. The email address northeastplanning@fws.gov was provided as the designated email address for the project. Comments were also made by participants at the four public meetings held in late August 2011 on comment forms and scrolls provided at exhibits showing the draft alternatives. Some participants submitted comments via more than one format but such comments were only counted once.

Figure 5-2: Format of Comments Received



Comments focused on the four draft alternatives presented in the newsletter as well as other suggested alternatives and alternative elements. Some of the responses were related to only one subject, while others addressed multiple subjects. Most stakeholders commented on transportation/parking, economic concerns, visitor use, the public process itself, the natural setting of the refuge, the Chincoteague ponies, beach management, and other general comments. Figure 5-3 provides the distribution of comments received by topic.

Figure 5-3: Topics Raised in Comments

5.4 Planning Team Meetings

USFWS assembled a CCP/EIS Planning Team of public stakeholders who met throughout the planning process for this CCP/EIS and included representatives from the following public agencies: USFWS, NPS Assateague Island National Seashore, town of Chincoteague, Accomack County, Accomack County Board of Supervisors, Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, VMRC, VDGIF, and NASA. Participants were added over time as they were identified, and although all agencies were invited to each meeting, not all were able to attend each meeting. The Volpe National Transportation Systems Center served as facilitator.

Three CCP Planning Team meetings were held:

- *April 6, 2011:* Participants discussed the qualities and attributes of the refuge, reviewed and revised management issues and goals, and drafted a preliminary refuge vision statement.
- *June 21-22, 2011:* Refuge solicited feedback on preliminary draft alternatives to be presented to the public in August for comment. Participants reviewed draft, preliminary management objectives and strategies for key issues across four alternatives and provided feedback on specific content, both in terms of what range of objectives should be considered for each issue but also how specific objectives can be accomplished. On one day, visitor service issues were discussed, and on the other day, resource management issues were discussed. Each day also covered cross-cutting issues.
- *December 21, 2011:* Participants discussed comments received and proposed changes to the CCP draft alternatives. The discussion and subsequent follow-up resulted in clarifications and additional changes to the alternatives.

5.5 Other Meetings of Note

Throughout the development of the draft CCP/EIS, from 2010 to 2012, the refuge conducted a series of meetings with local, Federal, and State agencies and representatives to inform them of the status of the CCP/EIS and solicit input on different considerations. These included meetings

specific to the economic analysis for the CCP and to the feasibility of relocating the recreational beach. Some of these meetings included the following:

- *August 10, 2010:* Meeting with Town Beach Access Committee.
- *September 9, 2010:* Coordination meeting with the VDGIF and the Wildlife Services (WS) Division of USDA-APHIS to discuss CCP issues.
- *February 4, 2011:* Coordination meeting with VDGIF and USDA-APHIS WS to discuss CCP issues.
- *March 7, 2011:* Meeting with Marine Science Consortium and NASA to discuss coastal zone research.
- *March 8, 2011:* Meeting with NPS and the VMRC to discuss CCP/GMP issues.
- *March 10, 2011:* Meeting by conference call with NPS to discuss CCP and GMP.
- *March 22, 2011:* Kick-off for SDM process for recreational beach.
- *April 28, 2011:* Webinar on sea level rise and coastal impoundment management to inform SDM process.
- *May 4, 2011:* Town Hall Meeting with NPS.
- *June 20, 2011:* Meeting with Congressman Scott Rigell (Virginia District 2) to discuss draft alternatives and tour proposed relocated recreational beach.
- *August 12, 2011:* Meeting with NPS to discuss CCP preliminary draft alternatives.
- *August 17, 2011:* Briefing by conference call of congressional staff on the CCP.
- *August 23, 2011:* Meeting with Town and USFWS Economics Division to discuss CCP economic analysis.
- *August 29, 2011:* Meeting with Mayor and Town staff to assess beach damage from Hurricane Irene.
- *September 19, 2011:* Tour of proposed beach relocation area by Town Beach Access Committee by hay wagon.
- *September 19, 2011:* Meeting with Ron Wolff, Supervisor, Accomack County and constituents in Atlantic, Virginia about CCP.
- *September 20, 2011:* Meeting with Beach Access Committee to discuss preliminary draft alternatives.
- *November 17, 2011:* Update by conference call of congressional staff on the CCP.
- *January 19, 2012:* Meeting with the Town to review the draft baseline economic analysis for the CCP.
- *February 17, 2012:* Oversight Hearing for the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs on "Fish and Wildlife Service's Proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan and its Potential Devastating Impact on the Economy of the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia."
- *February 22, 2012:* Meeting with USACE in Norfolk, Virginia on CCP issues.
- *February 23-24, 2012:* Presentation on the CCP at the Virginia State and Federal Partners Meeting, attended by various State and Federal agencies.
- *March 22, 2012:* Meeting with Virginia U.S. Senator Mark Warner's staff to provide overview of refuge CCP issues.
- *April 11, 2012:* Visit by representatives from the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement to tour the refuge and discuss CCP issues.
- *May 8, 2012:* Site visit by USACE to identify issues with relocated beach and parking sites.
- *May 15, 2012:* On-site visit and meeting with USGS and Virginia Tech to discuss sea level rise and the piping plover.

- *May 16, 2012:* Meeting between USFWS Region 5 staff and U.S. Congressman Scott Rigell (Virginia District 2).
- *June 4-5, 2012:* Site visit by consultant conducting external review of the CCP/EIS process, in particular the range of alternatives and their viability.
- *June 15-16, 2012:* Presentation and beach walk on climate change and sea level rise with Orrin Pilkey, Professor Emeritus of Earth and Ocean Sciences, Nicholas School of the Environment, at Duke University, and Founder and Director Emeritus of the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, which is currently based at Western Carolina University.
- *July 18, 2012:* Site visit and meeting with USACE, NPS, and local government officials to discuss impacts of beach and parking relocation.
- *July 31, 2012:* Kick-off for Wilderness Review (NPS and USFWS collaboration for Assateague Island).
- *August 8, 2012:* Informal consultation with USFWS staff on Delmarva fox squirrel status.
- *August 23, 2012:* Meeting between Joe McCauley, USFWS Region 5 Realty Chief, Division of Realty, and CCP regional lead, and the Town Council and the Beach Access Committee to discuss CCP.
- *September 13, 2012:* Presentation by USFWS Economics Division to Town Council and Beach Access Committee on results of baseline economic analysis for CCP.
- *October 17, 2012:* Presentation by USFWS Economics Division to Accomack County Board of Supervisors on results of baseline economic analysis for CCP.
- *October 17, 2012:* Meeting and site visit with U.S. Congressman Scott Rigell (Virginia District 2) and staff, as well as the Mayor of Chincoteague and representative from the Accomack County Board of Supervisors.
- *January 30, 2013:* Briefing on status of CCP by Joe McCauley for the Town of Chincoteague's Beach Access Committee via phone.
- *April 5, 2013:* Visit and meeting with Virginia U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, as well as the Mayor of Chincoteague and a representative of the Beach Access Committee, to discuss the CCP.

5.6 Public Outreach

USFWS employed a number of outreach strategies, including newsletters, a Web site, radio interviews, and traditional media coverage.

5.6.1 Newsletters

USFWS developed and distributed six "CCP Update" newsletters dated February 2011, May 2011, August 2011, August 2012, November 2012, and April 2013. The newsletters described the USFWS and the Refuge System, the planning process, proposed and updated Draft CCP/EIS schedule, summaries of public comments, potential issues to be addressed in the Draft EIS/CCP, draft Refuge vision and goals, and times and locations of upcoming public meetings. Additional details on each newsletter are provided below:

- *February 2011:* This newsletter described the NOI in the *Federal Register* to prepare the EIS/CCP and the initial public scoping process. In addition to background information on Chincoteague NWR, the newsletter provided a summary of comments from the completed public scoping process, including a categorization of all comments by topic area.
- *May 2011:* This newsletter outlined the members of the CCP/EIS Planning Team and introduced the structured decision-making processes for determining potential alternative

locations for the public recreational beach as well as other parallel efforts. In addition, the newsletter presented the draft vision statement and goals for the refuge.

- *August 2011:* This newsletter provided detail on the four preliminary draft alternatives under consideration to initiate a public comment period. In addition to providing the draft preliminary alternatives and requesting comments, the newsletter announced meeting purpose, dates, locations, and times; provided USFWS contact information; provided background summary information on the CCP; provided instructions on submitting comments; and listed locations where additional information on the process was available.
- *August 2012:* This newsletter provided information on the draft alternatives, refined from public feedback. Three alternatives are presented and, in light of public concerns expressed since the release of the preliminary draft alternatives, clarification as to how the different alternatives and the larger CCP effort will impact recreational beach access and parking.
- *November 2012:* This newspaper summarized the impact of Hurricane Sandy on the refuge and addressed how Hurricane Sandy would and would not impact the CCP/EIS. Overall, Hurricane Sandy resulted in a delay in schedule but no changes to alternatives.
- *April 2013:* This newsletter provided an update on the schedule for the CCP/EIS, a review of the alternatives, and information on post-Sandy restoration and the effects of the Federal budget sequestration on the refuge.
- *May 2014:* This newsletter announced the release of the draft CCP/EIS for public review and comment. In the newsletter, we briefly summarized the three management alternatives that we evaluated, plus we explained where to get a copy of the draft plan and how to submit comments.

The first three newsletters were made available online and in hard copy at several locations and public meetings. The August 2011 newsletter, in which the preliminary draft alternatives were first made public, was made available at the following locations and events:

- Refuge's Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center,
- NPS Toms Cove Visitor Center,
- The public library and Sundial Book Store in the town of Chincoteague,
- Public meetings for scoping and draft preliminary alternatives,
- Seashore's GMP meeting at the Marine Science Consortium on Wallops Island,
- Refuge's monthly Community Leaders Meetings, and
- A Kiwanis Club meeting featuring Refuge Manager Louis Hinds.

Hard copies of the August 2011 newsletter were also distributed by TNC and a refuge volunteer. Finally, hard copies were mailed to individuals upon request.

The other newsletters (August 2012, November 2012, and April 2013) were made available online, including through several forms of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. An additional newsletter summarizing the draft CCP/EIS was released and made available in May 2014 with release of the draft plan, and was mailed to those who requested to be on the mailing list.

5.6.2 Web

In addition to the newsletters, all meeting dates, updates to alternatives, and background information were made available on the refuge's CCP planning Web site throughout the process: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Chincoteague/ccphome.html>.

5.6.3 Radio

Throughout the CCP process, from August 2010 to March 2013, the refuge manager and others, including representatives from USFWS Region 5, have made periodic appearances on air on local radio stations WCTG 96.5 FM and Delmarva Public Radio's WSDL National Public Radio (NPR) News 90.7 to discuss the CCP. Such appearances have occurred to announce newsletters, public meetings, and address specific concerns around the CCP.

5.6.4 Media

There has been extensive media coverage of the CCP, from local newspapers such as the *Chincoteague Beacon* and *Eastern Shore News* to national newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, as well as on-line blogs and social media. USFWS has issued public releases to the media on newsletters and meetings. In addition, USFWS submitted a letter to the *Washington Post* in response to Timothy Saasta's opinion article, "A misguided approach to preserving Chincoteague's refuge," published in the *Post* on December 9, 2011. The USFWS letter was published December 23, 2011.

5.7 Draft CCP/EIS Public Comment Period

We initially released the draft CCP/EIS for 60 days of public review and comment from May 15, 2014 to July 14, 2014. In response to public requests, we extended that period another 30 days, to August 15, 2014. We held two public open house meetings in Chincoteague, and additional meetings in Melfa, Virginia and Pocomoke City, Maryland. As part of this public involvement process, USFWS also held a public hearing on June 26, 2014, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Chincoteague Center with 28 people formally raising a variety of issues and concerns. We evaluated all the letters and e-mails sent to us during that comment period, along with comments recorded at our public hearing. Please see Appendix R for a summary of all comments, and our responses to them.